



Guidance for Full Ceremony

A wedding is a wonderful occasion filled with hopes and dreams, and we are privileged to play a part in such a memorable event. We want to make everything run as smoothly as possible for you, from giving notice to planning your perfect ceremony, and have created this guide to help you prepare for your forthcoming wedding day. If there is anything else you want to know or are unsure about, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Our main office is in Taunton, but we have offices across Somerset and North Somerset where you can give Notice of Marriage. Please visit the website to find your nearest location. Use our central phone number and email address to get in touch with any of our offices.

Somerset Registration Service
The Old Municipal Building
Corporation Street
Taunton
Somerset
TA1 4AQ

SomersetRegistrations@somerset.gov.uk

www.SomersetWeddingService.org.uk

01823 282251

Giving Notice of Marriage & Payment

Both parties will need to give Notice of Marriage. This is the legal and public declaration that you intend to marry, and that you are both free and able to do so.

It must be done no more than 12 months and no less than 28 days prior to your marriage date. We recommend that you give Notice of Marriage around 3 to 6 months before your wedding date. After 28 days, a legal authority to marry will be granted. The legal paperwork necessary for your ceremony will be printed and retained by the Registration office in the district of your marriage, ready for your ceremony.

Visit our website for up to date information on what details you will need to provide, and the costs for giving Notice.

If one or both of you is a non-UK national, this process may take up to 70 days depending on your immigration status. Please see the Giving Notice section of our website for more details.

Your ceremony fee is payable 8 weeks prior to your wedding date and includes the cost of one marriage certificate. Further copies can be ordered at any time before the day of your wedding, or ordered online via the somerset.gov.uk website. The exact cost will depend on where and when you wish to get married. You can pay by card at our offices or over the phone if that is more convenient. We can only accept cheque payments at least 4 weeks before your ceremony.

Prior to the day

You may wish your ceremony to be a formal and traditional celebration with bridesmaids and pageboys, or you may prefer a relaxed family gathering. You might be dreaming of a quirky themed wedding or feel more comfortable with a quiet intimate ceremony. This is your day and the choice is yours.

It's possible to personalise your ceremony with a choice of vows, declarations, readings and music. Take some time to think about what you would like to say to each other during the ceremony, and what your marriage means to you. Let us know your choices on your Pre-ceremony Check form.

We will need to know:

- ❖ How many guests are expected

- ❖ The content of the ceremony and your choice of marriage vows, plus any additional readings and speeches
- ❖ Arrangements for music
- ❖ Details about the entry of the couple
- ❖ Roles of family members and friends within the ceremony
- ❖ Who are to be your legal witnesses

Things To Consider...

Witnesses

You will be required to provide two witnesses who could be, but do not need to be, friends or relatives. We ask that they are at least 16 years old and must be able to understand the ceremony and their role within it. Your witnesses will be asked to sign the schedule (formerly known as the register) after the ceremony. Give us their details on the Pre-ceremony Check Form.

Certificates

The cost of one certificate is included in your payment to the Registrar. Additional certificates can either be ordered and paid for ahead of your ceremony by calling us on 01823 282251, on the day by speaking to the Registrar or online at any time afterwards at someset.gov.uk. Following the introduction of the Marriage Schedule System on 4th May 2021, certificates are no longer produced during the ceremony. They will be posted out within 5 working days once your details have been uploaded to the digital record system.

Music

Music can be played at appropriate times during the ceremony. We recommend the following:

- ❖ Background music as your guests arrive
- ❖ Your Entrance
- ❖ Signing the Schedule
- ❖ Exit music

If you have a special piece of music or song, or even live musicians, please discuss this with the venue and include the information on your Pre-ceremony Check form. Do remember your choice of music must be of a non-religious nature. Ask your venue what format they would prefer the music to be (cd, USB, Bluetooth via phone etc). At our register office venues, we normally provide Bluetooth speakers so please bring your music choices downloaded on to a device that will connect with them. Ask a member of your party to operate the device, and the registrars will advise them when to start and stop the music. We don't advise streaming, as we can't provide guest wifi and the 4G signal may be unreliable.

Wedding Rings

It is traditional to exchange a wedding ring or rings, but you don't have to. You may wish to place these on a cushion or arrange for a ring bearer or best man to step forward at the appropriate moment. The wedding ring is placed on the third finger of the left hand, as this is traditionally thought to be connected to the heart. If you wish to exchange a different token, you may. Please let us know on your Pre-ceremony check form.

Readings and Poetry

You are welcome to add up to three readings to personalise your ceremony, though you don't have to if you prefer not to. They do provide a good opportunity to include additional family members and friends in your special day. There is a fantastic selection to be found online, though we will need to see them first to make sure they are appropriate and not too long. Do try to find readings that are personal or meaningful to you both and will reflect your love and commitment to each other. Please provide us with copies of your readings and the names of the readers 4 weeks in advance. If you are choosing an extract, please supply the full title of the piece. Please remember, all readings must be of a non-religious nature.

Photographs and Videos

You may wish to organise a professional photographer and/or videographer for your wedding. Alternatively, you may nominate a guest (who is not a witness) to do this. Your photographer and videographer must liaise with the Registration Officer on the day who will advise on timings and positioning for photographs. We ask that the use of flash is kept to a minimum and that the photography doesn't detract from your ceremony.

The Entrance Party

You will need to think about how you will enter the ceremony room. Would you like to enter together, or separately? Would you like to walk in accompanied by bridesmaids,

pages, a family member or close friend, or on your own? Would you prefer to enter with your guests and keep things completely casual? Please let us know your plans on the Pre-ceremony Check form.

Seating Arrangements

You will need to nominate someone who will be in the ceremony room to arrange seating. This could be the best man or other friend or family member, or there may be a wedding co-ordinator to help you. It's up to you whether your guests are seated according to which member of the wedding party they are connected. However, you do need to ensure that there are enough seats reserved for key family and friends, or members of the entrance party who will enter after everyone else is seated.

On The Day

Timings

If you are marrying at one of our Register Offices and wish to arrive separately, we request that Party 1 arrives 20 minutes before the ceremony, with Party 2 arriving 10 minutes later. If you wish to arrive together, please be there 20 minutes before the ceremony is due to start. The correct details to be entered into the register will be checked at this time.

Please note that ceremonies at The Old Municipal Buildings in Taunton, Abbey Manor in Yeovil, Frome Town Hall and The Old Town Hall in Weston-super-Mare are run as traditional Register Offices, with ceremonies back to back. Arriving too early or too late can not only impact your own ceremony but that of ceremonies either side of yours.

All couples book our Registrars for one hour – half an hour before your ceremony and half an hour for the ceremony itself – regardless of where the ceremony is taking place.

It is our best practice at licensed venues for Registrars to arrive half an hour before the ceremony start time in order to meet you and discuss any last-minute arrangements for the ceremony. The correct details to be entered into the schedule will be checked at this time. You can do this together or separately.

Whilst we appreciate that this is your special day, our Registrars usually carry out several ceremonies in one day, generally scheduled back to back around the most popular times. Late starts have a knock-on effect for other couples getting married. We therefore respectfully request that you and your guests are ready to start the ceremony at the agreed time. A late start may mean that your ceremony would have to be pared down or, in a worst-case scenario, postponed until later in the day.

Obviously not everything always goes to plan and in the event of unforeseen circumstances, we will do our best to be flexible in terms of delayed starts but cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The Ceremony

This is our suggested Order of Ceremony. You may choose to leave out some of the optional elements. Do remember that readings and music must not be religious in nature. They also need to be a suitable length so that the ceremony won't run over your allotted time. Don't feel you need to include extras if you don't want to. This is your day, and your ceremony.

Introduction and Welcome

Giving away **(Optional)**

Legal Preliminaries

1st Reading **(Optional)**

Declaration of freedom

Contract of Marriage

2nd Reading **(Optional)**

Personal Ring Vows **(Optional)**

3rd Reading **(Optional)**

Announcement

Signing of the Schedule

Photography **(Optional)**

Your Marriage Vows

The law requires that one of each of the following choices of the 'Declaration of Freedom' and 'Contracting Words' are repeated by both parties. You must choose the same option as your partner. Many couples like to add personal vows after the legal statements. These must be non-religious in content and must be approved in advance. Please indicate your choices to the Pre Ceremony Check Form and send us a copy of the vows.

Declaration of Freedom

You will each be asked to repeat the following words after the Registration Officer:

- 1) I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I may not be joined in matrimony to

or

- 2) I declare that I know of no legal reason why I may not be joined in marriage to

or

- 3) by replying "I am" to the question "Are you free lawfully to marry?"

The Contracting Words

You will each be required to repeat the following words after the Registration Officer:

- 1) I call upon these persons here present to witness that I do take thee to be my lawful wedded wife/husband.

or

- 2) I take you to be my wedded wife/husband.

or

- 3) I take thee to be my wedded wife/husband.

Ring Vows

If you are exchanging rings, you may wish to choose one of the following vows, or you may wish to write your own. These must be non-religious in content and approved in advance. The Registrar will say the vow in sections for you to repeat. Please add your choices to the form.

Standard

I give you this ring as a symbol of our love, trust and marriage.

Ring exchange one

I give you this ring as a token of my love and affection.

Please wear it with a feeling of warmth and pride

I will love you, and remain faithful to you, now and always.

Ring exchange two

I give you this ring as a sign of our love

I promise to be faithful, loving and loyal for always

To cherish you through good times and bad, and to respect and honour you

Ring exchange three

I promise to give you my love and friendship,

To be there for you when you need me the most,

To laugh with you, to cry with you, and to confide in you,

To trust you, to comfort you, and to support you.

All that I have I share with you.

I promise to respect you, and be faithful to you always.

These promises I make for the rest of my life

And I give you this ring as a token of our marriage.

Ring exchange four

This ring represents our love.

I vow to love you and care for you

I shall spend my life with you

And share everything I have with you.

And Finally...

The Registrar will add closing words and the Officer will complete the registration of your marriage. You will both be required to check your marriage schedule document along with your two witnesses. Please make sure that everything is accurate, as there is a fee for making corrections later. Your certificate will be created and posted to you within 5 working days.

There will be an opportunity for further photographs, after which you will both lead your guests from the marriage room.

If you have any further questions about preparing for your ceremony or what will happen on the day, please check our website for a list of FAQs and more information. If you can't find what you're looking for, just email the team with your query.

Covid Guidance

We are delighted that restrictions have eased and that ceremonies are now looking more like normal. However, Covid19 is still a real risk, and we are very aware of the need to protect staff and public as we learn to live with this virus. Government guidance for COVID secure ceremonies can change quite quickly. The information in this section was correct at the time of writing but may be replaced by any further Covid measures introduced by government. We will do our best to update this document should any changes be announced. The link below will take you to the most up to date information ahead of your ceremony.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Wedding and civil partnership ceremonies, receptions and celebrations: guidance from Step 4 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-wedding-and-civil-partnership-ceremonies-receptions-and-celebrations-guidance-from-step-4)

In brief, these are the major points regarding ceremonies after July 19th 2021:

- No legal cap on guest numbers - liaise with your venue to check how many guests you can now have. Registration Office numbers are listed below.
- No legal requirement for social distancing, but this is still something to consider as covid is still a risk
- No legal requirement for masks, but this is still strongly recommended indoors or in crowded areas
- Must not attend if showing any covid symptoms or have received instructions to self-isolate

What you can do to help make your ceremony a safer event:

- Ask your guests to use the Test & Trace App
- Encourage guests to take lateral flow tests (we will not be asking for results)
- Wash hands and use sanitiser
- Wear masks indoors (this is a personal choice but highly recommended)
- Check if any of your guests have any concerns and would prefer to socially distance

What we will do to protect you, your guests and our staff:

- Provide hand sanitiser at our own venues

- Encourage our staff to wear masks indoors while not performing ceremonies
- Enable our staff to practice social distancing during ceremonies
- Provide good ventilation and regular cleaning at our own venues
- Work with licensed venues to promote safe practices
- Collect guest information for Test & Trace where necessary

Room Capacity At Register Office Venues

While there is no legal cap on guest numbers, we have a duty of care to our staff to provide a safe working environment. As our busy team conduct multiple ceremonies a day all through the week, it's vital that we protect their wellbeing to ensure future ceremonies can go ahead. To balance this with the wishes of couples to include as many friends and family in their special day as they can, we are offering a choice.

Ceremony rooms that can be well ventilated by opening doors and windows during the ceremony can return to their pre-covid maximum capacities. Please be aware that all rooms will be ventilated while guests arrive and leave. However, if you choose to have more guests the doors and/or windows will also remain open during your ceremony while you are exchanging vows. This could cause considerable noise and distraction at some venues, (particularly those in town centre environments) which is likely to impair the experience for you and your guests.

If you would prefer to keep doors and windows closed, reducing both noise and ventilation, then we have calculated a lower party size based on airflow tests. Please see the table below for your options, and let us know on your Pre Ceremony Check form which option you would prefer. Please note that the registrars are not included in these numbers. If you wish to have photographers, musicians etc, they should be included in the guest numbers. Children under 1 or "babes in arms" do not need to be included in these numbers.

Room	Fee	Guests		Witnesses		Couple		Party Total
The Old Municipal Buildings, Taunton								
Tudor Hall (closed)	£350	36	+	2	+	2	=	40
Tudor Hall (ventilated)	£350	96		2		2	=	100
Vivary Room (closed)	£200	10	+	2	+	2	=	14
Vivary Room (ventilated – this is still below the previous maximum limit)	£200	34	+	2	+	2	=	38
The Old Town Hall, Weston Super Mare								
Hutton Suite (closed)	£150	8	+	2	+	2	=	12
Hutton Suite (ventilated)	£150	36	+	2	+	2	=	40
Old Council Chamber (closed)	£200	20	+	2	+	2	=	24

Old Council Chamber (ventilated)	£200	56	+	2	+	2	=	60
Abbey Manor, Yeovil								
Mandeville Room (downstairs - closed)	£200	25	+	2	+	2	=	29
Mandeville Room (downstairs - ventilated)	£200	36	+	2	+	2	=	40
Frome Town Hall, Frome								
The Meeting Room (closed)	£200	2	+	2	+	2		6
The Meeting Room (ventilated)	£200	16	+	2	+	2		20
The Council Chamber (closed)	£350	24	+	2	+	2	=	28
The Council Chamber (ventilated)	£350	96	+	2	+	2	=	100